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## WHAT PRIVATE ORGANIZATIONS HAVE LEARNED ABOUT

### DOING TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE WORK

The experience of voluntary agencies in technical cooperation has been distilled and summarized in a 66-page book published last year by the Public Administration Clearing House--Fifty Years of Technical Assistance. I commend it to any of you who are interested in going into this subject in more detail than is possible in a brief panel discussion. In view of this excellent summary of what voluntary organizations have learned and the points which other members of this panel are covering, I would like to suggest a few of the many areas in which we still have much to learn.

1. We have learned that we need inspired, technical competent personnel, highly skilled in the art of human relations who are willing to devote a substantial period of time to a given project--but we have not learned enough about how to recruit, select and prepare personnel for work in cultures quite different from our own.

In contrast to the technicians sent out by FOA or by United Nations Technical Assistance Administration and the U.N. specialized agencies working primarily at the government level, many private organizations emphasize "grass roots" work with village people. Work at the village level is rigorous. Living conditions are often primitive. Adaptation to another culture--to a different value system--makes heavy demands upon one intellectually, physically and emotionally. The technician must be a good team member--not a "lone wolf operator". He must relate his particular field of competence to the total project in an imaginative kind of way. He should be a teacher--able to inspire others and to get ideas across, not only in a local language but even more important, in the local thought patterns. He must be a resourceful innovator, relying on materials available locally and keeping his work within the capacity of the people to understand and to carry out themselves. While possessing enough self-confidence and assurance to carry him through frustrations and disappointments, he must at the same time have genuine humility and an eagerness to learn from those he is trying to help.

Jobs of this kind call for the vigor, adaptability and enthusiasm of youth combined with the wisdom, experience and maturity that only an older man can be expected to have. While there is a natural desire to find more opportunities in overseas work for the young, technically trained college graduate, I would like to mention one problem in addition to those suggested by Mr. Peterson in connection with the employment of these younger persons. A young man just out of college is naturally eager to make good, to be successful in his first professional assignment. He wants to produce results. In order to satisfy his own need for accomplishment and tangible results, he may try to do too much in too short a time, pushing his ideas too vigorously and in the end he may arouse resistance instead of gaining acceptance for new ideas and new methods. He has not had an opportunity to learn from experience how slow many farmers in our own country are about adopting new practices.

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Speech by Mrs. Lorraine K. Cleveland of the Foreign Service Section of the American Friends Service Committee, Philadelphia, Pa., before the Conference for Agricultural Services in Foreign Areas, jointly sponsored by the U.S. Department of Agriculture and the Foreign Operations Administration in Washington, D.C., February 9, 1955.

Of course, there are some young men who are "naturals", who have no compulsive need for quick results and who from the very first seem to know how to "play by ear". These are the ones whom we should most certainly try to use in our various programs.

When we find a person, older or younger, with the qualities which we consider so essential, we need to make some inquiry about his wife. Does she share her husband's enthusiasm and interest in an overseas assignment? Is she prepared to live out in a village, cut off from all familiar social, recreational and cultural opportunities? Unless she has some training or experience which enables her to make some reasonable contribution to the project, she is likely to become miserably bored and unhappy. A bored, unhappy wife can quickly undermine her husband's effectiveness in any job. Therefore, the American Friends Service Committee makes it a practice to give careful consideration to the suitability of the wife for an overseas assignment. Personal references are secured and she is interviewed with her husband. A good husband-wife team can make an unusually significant contribution in a technical assistance program.

Something should also be said about children. Where do they fit into the picture? In the depressed villages where our own organization is working, we have found no satisfactory solution for the educational problem presented by children of school age--particularly of upper elementary and high-school age. The village schools are inadequate even by local standards. The alternatives seem to be private tutoring by the parent or some other member of the team--or boarding school. Knowing the importance of family life in the emotional development of a child --and the special need of a child, uprooted from his normal cultural surroundings, to find his security within the family group, we do not feel that a boarding school offers an adequate solution. Thus, in some of our projects, we have regretfully had to limit our consideration to persons with children of pre-school age or of college age.

2. We have learned to appreciate the contribution which the social sciences, and particularly social anthropology, have to offer in the planning and carrying out of any technical cooperation project. However, we need to go much further than we have to date in learning how to apply this knowledge in practical situations.

We know, for example, that agricultural practices in an ancient culture are interconnected with many patterns of personal and social behavior, religious beliefs, and so forth. Introduction of a new practice does not merely add something new; more often it destroys an old structure or pattern. While we may encounter problems in finding the appropriate new technique to introduce, or in teaching and explaining it once it has been found, we need to develop much greater ability to anticipate the effect of a particular innovation upon long-established cultural patterns and we need to be prepared to fill creatively some of the vacuums which we may have brought about. Supposing, for example, that we introduce a piece of agricultural machinery which no longer makes it necessary for the woman to work in the field side by side with her husband. We are disrupting long-established patterns of family life and work and we must be prepared to help the woman, whose time has thus been released, to find new and satisfying ways to relate herself to the needs of her family.

We know that people in certain parts of the world have quite a different concept of time from that which is familiar to us. To a greater extent than many of us would like to admit, we equate time with money. We adopt labor-saving devices in order to increase our productivity and to use the time that we save in some other productive way. We are accustomed to regulating our lives by the clock, to be prompt for appointments, and so forth. There is a sense of urgency about what we are doing. We want to get on with it without delay. One of our Indian staff members commented that Westerners "use time as a crutch", and when we get to India and find that our familiar crutch has been taken away from us we feel very frustrated and lost.

In some cultures, leisure has a very high value--perhaps even a higher value than money. Therefore, when labor-saving ideas are adopted, we need not be surprised to find that our local friends spend their new leisure in the coffee shop rather than bestirring themselves to work on the terracing of a stony hillside which would bring more land under cultivation.

Recently, in our project in Jordan, our staff have been giving a village some encouragement in cleaning out a spring. During one of the later stages of the work, one of the village elders stated that the spring project was "for the benefit of the Quakers". When pressed for his meaning, his reply was that since we were in such a hurry to get the job finished, it must be for our benefit.

3. And this brings us to the problem of communication. How do we communicate what we want to communicate? And do we really know what we are actually communicating? In the spring project just mentioned, our staff intended to extend friendly encouragement and assistance, but the only conclusion which the village elder was able to draw was that the project must be for our own benefit. Or take another example from India this time. Our staff was interested in communicating the idea of the dignity of manual labor. On a number of occasions the technicians and the local village workers have participated in village projects involving manual labor, such as the building of a road. On one occasion, they were helping villagers who were engaged in a well-digging project. They worked vigorously on breaking up rocks to be used in lining the well. Our Indian anthropologist later discovered that the staff had communicated nothing at all in regard to the dignity of labor. What they had communicated was merely their superior physical strength. There is indeed much more that we need to learn about communicating ideas.

4. We need to learn more about how we can wisely and effectively help people to develop a concept of change. One of our agriculturists commented on his return from an assignment in India that if anyone were to ask him what Philadelphia or Chicago might look like 100 years from now, he would frankly have no idea. On the other hand, if he were to ask any Indian in the villages where he was working what his village would look like 100 years hence, the villager would assume that it would, of course, be exactly the same 100 years in the future as it is now. In other words, the concept of change does not even exist in the minds of some village people.

Only yesterday I had a letter from our agriculturist in Jordan. Although the word "experiment" can be translated into Arabic, it doesn't convey at all the same meaning in translation that we give it. Our agriculturist has been testing out some new varieties of seeds in a rather inconspicuous spot because he had been advised by our Arab staff members that even if he labeled this plot as an "experiment", the villagers would lose faith in him if his "experimental plantings" failed.

In order to create a concept of change in the minds of people, we must stimulate desires--a desire for better health, for better food, for a more adequate water supply, for better housing. Once we set in motion this chain reaction of desire, we can only pray that mankind will find a right balance between material values and spiritual values.

In conclusion I would like to tell you of a conversation I had with an Indian social worker at the end of his three months' visit to the United States. When I asked him what in our country he had been least prepared for, he replied without hesitation, "Your poverty". Since I am myself a social worker, I have had some occasion to see the extent of poverty in many parts of the United States, but I was surprised that it had impressed my Indian friend so strongly. When I asked him to explain what he had in mind, he replied very simply, "Poverty is a lack of resources to satisfy one's wants".

As we seek to share our technical knowledge, may we always be open to what our friends overseas can teach us.





